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SELF-LOVE IN ARISTOTLE

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The passages in *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) IX¹ where Aristotle discusses self-love have generally been discussed in the context of the question whether or not Aristotle's ethics is egoistic in a modern sense. While this is a crucial issue,² I want to turn to the different question, what is the role of self-love in Aristotle's ethics. Self-love is discussed only in the books on friendship, but what is said about it there has repercussions beyond these books, and it is of interest to ask what exactly these are.

In IX 4 self-love is introduced to help us understand the notion of *philia*, the subject of books VIII and IX. (I shall follow the convention of translating this as 'friendship,' though this is not completely satisfactory.) Aristotle gives five marks by which people define friendship. Although he does not give them in his own person but talks throughout of what 'they' say, he never indicates that he regards these views as merely endoxic, and the reference back to this passage in IX 8 (1168 b 3-6) makes it clear that Aristotle does himself endorse them. A friend, then, is one who (1) wishes and does good (or apparently good) things to a friend, for the friend's sake, (2) wishes the friend to exist and live, for his own sake, (3) spends time with his friend, (4) makes the same choices as his friend and (5) finds the same things pleasant and painful as his friend. But, argues Aristotle, all these marks are found paradigmatically in the good person's relation to himself.

Each of these seems to belong to the good person by virtue of his relation to himself, and he relates to his friend as he does to himself, for the friend is another self (1166 a 30-32).

Friendship to another is thus conceived of as treating him as another self, and this is explained as extending (cf. 1168 b 6) to another some important ways in which one relates to oneself, namely the five specified.

Clearly Aristotle is not here deriving friendship from self-love, or giving us an argument with self-love in the premises and friendship to another in the conclusion.³ If he were, then the crucial point, that a friend is another self, would be simply begging the question. Rather, Aristotle is explaining

friendship in terms of relations that are clearest in the case of self-love, but without reducing the former to the latter in any way. In the course of this explanation he clarifies several familiar facts.

One is that self-love is what I shall call psychologically primary. That is, 'each person wishes goods for himself most of all' (1159 a 11-12). In the case of each person, one's own self and concerns are inescapably nearer and more pressing than the selves and concerns of others. This in no way implies that one can only care for others in a way making them instrumental to one's own concerns. Nor does it imply that one *should* put one's own concerns first, or even that it is morally permissible to do this.

Secondly, to have a friend is to wish for their good for their own sake. (Cf. 1155 b 31: *tôi de philôi phasi dein boulesthai tagatha ekeinou heneka*.) Friendship is caring about the other person for their own sake; caring about them instrumentally, for their contribution to your interests, is not friendship but something else. An account of friendship must therefore account for nothing less than this, or have failed.⁴ The third is that we can in fact extend self-love in certain ways, for a friend is another self; we can relate to a friend in some of the ways we relate to ourselves. Thinking of a friend as another self is *not* trying to have to him exactly the kind of concern that I have for myself. Aristotle seems in fact to regard this as an *excess* of concern for others, and not admirable: see 1166 b 1-2. Rather, the agent extends to his friend the five listed types of concern he has for himself. He wishes good to the friend for the friend's own sake, shares his views and his joys and sorrows, and so on. And this, Aristotle thinks, is not only possible but what in fact happens all the time.

Concern for others for their own sake is thus not reduced to a form of self-love. Humans come equipped both with self-love and with the ability to extend this in certain ways to others. Aristotle says little about this ability and seems to take it for granted. In IX 4 he is talking about mature forms of friendship between ethically developed adults, but what he says earlier at 1161 b 16-24 is also illuminating. There he says that parental love⁵ is the basis of all family friendship, and parents love their children 'as being something of themselves.' A reason for this, given at some length, is that a parent regards his or her offspring as his or her own, a sort of detached part of himself or herself, just as one regards one's teeth or hair as detachable parts of oneself; the offspring or detachable parts cannot reciprocate this attitude. This

suggests a view rather like the Stoic one: at birth we are equipped with feelings of affinity for ourselves and for our offspring, and it is the later development of reason that enables us to extend our concern to others beyond what we have produced.⁶ On this view, we have a natural instinctive concern for what we can regard as extensions of ourselves; in a rationally developed adult this instinct will have developed into an ability to extend to unrelated others the attitudes of concern for their own sake, sharing their joys and sorrows, etc., but will still be derived from an unlearned instinct. Just as we do not have to learn to love our children, we do not have to learn to relate to others in some of the concerned ways we relate to ourselves, though the latter requires a more complex and rational view of both ourselves and others. The passages in VIII and IX on family and kin friendships certainly suggest some such account as a plausible one,⁷ but in IX 4 Aristotle does not give us a developmental account; he presents the way ethically developed adults extend self-love to others without asking about its instinctive basis.

IX 4 also introduces the idea that when we are considering self-love and treating a friend as another self, the self at issue is really the person's reasoning part (1166 a 17-23). There is, of course, a notorious problem as to how we are to relate the identification of the person with what is clearly her practical reasoning in IX (4 and 8) to the identification of the person with theoretical reasoning in X 7. I do not think that we need to solve this problem in order to understand what is going on in IX itself; the problems enter in when we read X, and in the present context I propose to ignore them. I assume throughout that it is only the practical reasoning with which the person is identified.

In IX 4 this striking thesis plays a role in the chapter's preoccupation with friendships between the *good*; for Aristotle is concerned not just with any old ways in which self-love might be extended as he specifies, but with ways in which good people share one another's views, wish good for one another, and so forth. Aristotle does not make it explicit here why he focuses on the virtuous, but the obvious explanation is that he is here concerned with the paradigm case of friendship, friendship of character, and this only the good can have. In the best and paradigm case of friendship, the agent cares for his friend for the friend's sake, and Aristotle regards this as equivalent to caring for the friend for the sake of the friend's virtuous character; for this is what the friend can be regarded as essentially being (1156 b 7-9). But an agent will not care for a friend's virtuous character unless he is

himself virtuous in character; the result of treating your friend as another self will not be the best kind of friendship unless the self-concern that is extended is virtuous to begin with.

In IX 4 Aristotle expands on this idea in terms which sound strange (the person is identified with his reasoning) but which are, as he points out later in IX 8, really quite intuitive (1168 b 34- 1169 a 3). For what is it to identify with your practical reasoning? It is simply to make decisions and commitments based on what developed practical reasoning has worked out, and to regard these as *your* decisions and commitments. As Aristotle says, such a person will be a unity; for she will not be seriously tempted or torn by impulses that would come into conflict with *her* decisions. And this is only possible in the person in whom practical reason has developed along with virtuous dispositions, so that feelings and impulses have developed in ways harmonious with the decisions and commitments of practical reason. Someone without the virtues may come to a good decision, but will not fully regard it as *her* decision, for she will partly identify with the impulses tempting her to reject it; so such a person will be torn and divided in the way Aristotle describes in IX 4. Aristotle does not say so here, but such people are capable of the lesser kinds of friendship, those based on pleasure and advantage.

Even the more striking parts of IX 4, then, are to be interpreted in a way which is close to common sense. Aristotle is not reducing friendship to self-love, but showing how, if we are virtuous to begin with, we can extend our concern to form the best kind of friendship, in which concern for the friend for her sake turns out to be concern for her for the sake of her virtuous character. It is not regarded as questionable that we do achieve concern for others for their own sake.

Self-love appears again in chapter IX 8, which takes the form of raising and solving a puzzle. 'Should one (*dei*) most love oneself or someone else?' As we have seen, this question is left open by the discussion in IX 4. On the one hand, Aristotle says, self-love is blamed, and people think that it is bad people who do everything for their own sake, while a good person acts because of the noble (*dia to kalon*), doing this the more the better he is, and also acts for the sake of a friend, letting his own interests go (1168 a 29-35). But this is in conflict with a second set of considerations: People say that one should most love (*philein*) that which is most *philos*, most of a friend. But this is the person who most wishes goods to someone for that person's sake, even if nobody knows. And each person stands most in this relation to himself, since he stands most

to himself in the five ways of which friendship was defined as the extension to others. Various proverbs suggest this also (1168 b 1-10).

There are several ways in which this is not a standard Aristotelian conflict of *endoxa* with other *endoxa* or with theory, despite Aristotle's standard claim at 1168 b 12-13 that both sides are plausible and that we must make distinctions to find where the truth is on both sides. For one thing, the first set of *endoxa* are not just a problematic set of beliefs; they are absolutely ground-floor beliefs in ethics. The whole of the *Ethics*, it could be said, answers to the points that the good person acts because of the noble, and will disregard his own interests for the sake of a friend. Then, surprisingly, we are told (1168 a 36- b 1) that it is reasonable (*ouk alogôs*) that facts (*ta erga*) conflict with these accounts (*tois logois de toutois*). For it is surprising that these very basic beliefs about people acting, as we would put it, morally and altruistically, are put on the *logos* side of the *logos/ergon* contrast, with its customary suggestion that they are in some way merely a matter of expression and what people say, and less close to reality than the considerations on the other side.

What we get on the other side, of course, is, apart from the proverbs, just what Aristotle has established in IX 4: concern for others is an extension of certain ways in which one relates paradigmatically to oneself. But, apart from the oddity of the *logos/ergon* contrast here, it is not at all clear why we are supposed to have a conflict. Blaming self-love, and contrasting it with moral and altruistic action, is quite consistent with recognizing the psychological primacy of self-love as that was established in IX 4. Aristotle only produces a conflict by adding as a premise the fact that people think that we *should* most love what is most *philon*. And this is far from being as obvious as it might seem from the Greek *dein philein malista ton malista philon* (1168 b 1-2). For it is *not* obvious that one *should* put one's own interests first; even if self-love is psychologically primary, there are other reasons to put moral and altruistic reasons first.

Perhaps we should not make heavy weather of this, however. Aristotle must, after all, have been acquainted with the common enough view that one should put one's own interests first, and it may just have seemed obvious that although the position of IX 4 does not in fact imply this, it would in fact be used to support it. If self-love is in fact psychologically primary, a lot of people will in fact think that it then seems reasonable to put one's own interests first. If this is what some people do in fact think, it does not matter if it is not

implied by IX 4; it is still a belief to set against the first set of beliefs. It is noteworthy, however, that in what follows Aristotle does not distance himself from these beliefs: he proceeds as though the thesis established by these beliefs were one that he has to establish.

The conflict is defused by distinguishing how those on each side understand self-love, being *philautos*. Those who think it bad are identifying the self with the lower, irrational part of the soul which is gratified when the person is eager to get the most money, honours and pleasure for himself. But Aristotle has already in IX 4 said that the person he is talking about identifies himself with the decisions and commitments springing from a properly developed practical reason. And for this person to love himself is for him to gratify his reason, which he does in performing virtuous actions. Those who say that self-love is bad are therefore talking about something different.

Aristotle recognizes that his own view sounds paradoxical:

If someone were constantly keen to be the best of all in doing just actions, or temperate ones, or anything else concerned with the virtues, and in general always acquired the noble (*to kalon*) for himself, nobody would call *him* self-loving, or blame him. But this person *would* seem to be a self-lover even more [than the other kind] (1168 b 25-29).

Aristotle here defends a thesis which in ordinary life everyone would reject; something noteworthy, since he generally regards this as a sign that something has gone wrong with the argument. The idea that the virtuous person is the true 'self-lover' clearly did sound paradoxical. The author of the *Magna Moralia*, in the passage corresponding to this one, refuses to call the virtuous person 'self-loving'; he is 'good-loving, not self-loving' (1212 b 18-20). The author of the Hellenistic version of Aristotelian ethics preserved by Arius Didymus (to which we shall return) likewise defends something like Aristotle's ideas in this chapter, but refuses to extend the use of the word *philautos*; on Aristotle's account, virtue does not turn out to be self-loving, he insists.⁸

For the rest of the chapter Aristotle defends his thesis, that the good person should be self-loving since he is the true lover of self, by showing that properly understood this does not conflict with our basic beliefs that good people act virtuously and altruistically. It is noteworthy, again, that he proceeds in this way rather than taking these beliefs to indicate that there is something wrong with the paradoxical-sounding thesis.

Firstly, Aristotle talks about what Richard Kraut has aptly called 'moral competition':

Everyone welcomes and praises people who are especially eager to do noble actions. And when everyone competes for the noble and strains to do the noblest things everything will be as it should in common and each will individually get the greatest of goods, since virtue is like that. So the good person should be a self-lover, for in doing noble actions he will aid himself and also benefit the others, but the wicked person should not, for in following base feelings he will harm both himself and his neighbors (1169 a 6-15).

If everyone is self-loving, then people will compete, for each will be concerned to put his own interests first. But, claims Aristotle, if the self-love is of the right kind, that is, love of the person's practical reasoning, then the resulting competition will be benign, for people will be competing to be most virtuous, and this does not have the same results as competitions for what is normally 'fought over' (1168 b 19).

Richard Kraut has argued that in this passage Aristotle is defending a notion of moral competition. Only one person can win, and be the most virtuous person. But while the others are losers in a sense, each gains by being more virtuous than she would have been without competition, and this matters far more than the fact of not being the *most* virtuous. So in moral competition I benefit from becoming spurred to more virtuous activity, and this will tend to benefit others, as virtuous activity does. Further, Kraut claims, Aristotle elsewhere commits himself to theses that strongly limit the scope of moral competition. Firstly, a virtuous agent cares for the good of others, so that he does not want to win by having others make moral mistakes. And secondly, when competing for some good would actually diminish the happiness of others, that good should be fairly shared, as opportunities for political office should be shared among equals. 'Aristotle is pointing out a way in which each person can justifiably love himself most of all: in striving against others in fair moral competition, the person I want most of all to win is of course myself. But we can see from what he says elsewhere that, in his opinion, we may sometimes have to settle for less of the good for ourselves, so that others can have their fair share.'⁹ Thus moral competition is hedged by restrictions that remove such elements as taking advantage of the others' weakness, or winning at their expense.

Kraut's explanation of this difficult passage is plausible, but I am not convinced that it wholly explains this passage in its context. What Aristotle is doing here is establishing

why, granted the right understanding of self-love, we should love ourselves most of all, in spite of our beliefs that good people act virtuously (because of the noble) and sacrifice their own interests to those of their friends. I think that it is therefore not completely satisfactory to have to rely on crucial restrictions to the operation of self-love, and competition, which come from outside the passage and are not suggested by anything in it.¹⁰

What Aristotle is doing, I think, is reinterpreting the notion of competition here, rather than accepting it with major restrictions. He has at some length established that true self-love consists in loving, and identifying yourself with, your practical reason, rather than loving bodily or external goods. True self-love has thus been considerably reinterpreted and redefined from what most people think self-love is. As a result, competition among true self-lovers is also reinterpreted, and turns out, consistently, to be different from what most people think competition is. Normally, competition is for a limited good, and hence at the others' expense; if I get more you get less. But when people compete to be virtuous, what they do is not at the others' expense, since *each* person gets the greatest good;¹¹ and this is because 'virtue is that kind of thing,' *hé areté toiouton estin*. If I have more, this does not leave less for you; so true competition, like true self-love, does not take anything away from others, or conflict with their interests, or do them down. Aristotle is saying of virtue something like what Shelley said of love:

True love in this differs from gold and clay
That to divide is not to take away.¹²

And the results are paradoxical in both cases. Virtue is the object of a competition in which everyone gets the greatest of goods; there is no winner and no losers, and things work out well for everyone. This kind of competition is like what we think of as co-operation: *true* competition is not really competition at all.

It is unusual for Aristotle to reinterpret familiar notions in paradoxical ways. But we can see clearly why he does it here: he is reconciling the thesis that good people should be self-loving with the basic belief that what good people do is act virtuously, because of the noble. Aristotle does this by saying that when good people act in self-loving ways, the resulting competition will be just what it is to act because of the noble, in a virtuous and unselfish way. For in good people the competition will be a competition to be virtuous, and this will not be in the ordinary sense a competition at

all. This is clear from another passage where he introduces the idea of moral competition (though not interpreting it in terms of self-love):

Those who are friends because of virtue are eager to do good to one another . . . and when they compete in this there are no complaints or fights. For no-one is annoyed with someone who loves and benefits him; if he is gracious, he will retaliate by doing good. And the winner, getting what he aims at, will not complain about his friend; for each is aiming at the good (1162 b 6-13).

The language of competition has been completely reinterpreted. The 'competitive' urge is to do good to others; one 'retaliates' with benefits. Thus true self-love is compatible with virtuous action, aimed at the noble.

In the final part of IX 8 Aristotle claims that his thesis that one should be self-loving (in the right way) does not conflict with the other problematic *endoxon*, namely that the good person will sacrifice his own interests for another.

It is true, concerning the good person, that for the sake of his friends and his country he will do much, and die for them if necessary; he will sacrifice money and honours and in general goods that are fought over, obtaining for himself the noble. He will choose a short period of intense pleasure rather than a long period of mild pleasure, and choose to live nobly for a year rather than for many years in an ordinary way, and choose one action which is noble and great rather than many small ones. This is certainly¹³ true of those who die for others; they choose for themselves what is great and noble. They will sacrifice money in circumstances where their friends will get more; for the friend gets money, while he gets what is noble, so he does assign himself the greater good. It is the same with honours and offices—he will sacrifice all these to his friend; for this is for him noble and praiseworthy. It is then reasonable that he seems to be good, in choosing the noble in exchange for everything. It is possible to sacrifice actions to one's friend, and for it to be nobler to be responsible for a friend's action than to act oneself. In all praiseworthy matters, then, the good person appears as assigning himself more of what is noble. This is the way, then, that one should be a lover of self, as we have said, but we should not be in the way the many are (1169 a 18- 1169 b 2).

Aristotle's attempt to reconcile self-love with altruism has rightly been found very problematic. Altruism turns out to be formally self-serving after all; even the ultimate sacrifice, dying for another, turns out to be assigning to yourself more of what matters more. And in the way he presents the altruistic choice as a choice of the heroic over the humdrum, Aristotle seems to be assimilating it to a familiar Greek tradition of heroism that is distinctly self-centred in its desire to shine and excel for a brief and glorious moment.¹⁴ But if self-sacrifice turns out really to be a form of self-love, then we have Aristotle apparently endorsing a basically self-centred model of ethical

action even in cases where the agent sacrifices his interests for others. And this is worrying; apart from its merits as a solution to the problem Aristotle considers in IX 8, it can hardly be confined to that chapter. If the cases of self-sacrifice Aristotle describes in IX 8 are really cases of self-love, then all cases of altruism would seem to be cases of self-love.

Kraut again claims that the apparent self-centredness does not present a problem, once we take into account some obvious restrictions. We should not assume that the virtuous person in question is manipulating situations so as to maximize his own attempts on the noble, leaving his friends mere money, honours and so on. (This would of course be especially obnoxious in the case of giving friends opportunities for noble deeds instead of doing them oneself.) Rather, he suggests, Aristotle 'may be thinking of a situation in which one person is uniquely situated, so that he and no others are presented with a chance to exercise [e.g.] courage.'¹⁵ The virtuous person should not be thought of as deliberately depriving others of the opportunity to act virtuously. Virtuous people equally divide opportunities for virtuous activity, but a virtuous person will, if called upon to do so, perform a heroic act, and, in so doing, regard himself as obtaining the benefits of active virtue, rather than the passive benefits arising from others being actively virtuous.¹⁶

Once again I am not completely happy with the way that Kraut brings in restrictions from outside in order to mitigate the apparent self-centredness of Aristotle's conclusion. We are not told anything in the chapter about the kind of situation in which the good person will make sacrifices. We are merely told that he will in fact make various kinds of sacrifice for others, and also told that in making these sacrifices he is systematically gaining, or assigning to himself, more of something which in each case is worth more than what is sacrificed. It is not at all clear that we are entitled to restrict the scope of these sacrifices so that the self-centredness does not appear so bad. Again, I think that an interpretation of this passage should show how in it Aristotle is reconciling his thesis about self-love with the *endoxa* about altruism, without making crucial appeal beyond the passage.

The problem with this passage is, of course, that Aristotle appears to solve the problem about altruism and self-love by interpreting altruism as really being self-love after all. And however refined the self-love, this leaves altruism as apparent and self-love as more basic.

We would try to lessen the problem by noting that what Aristotle says about self-sacrifice being gain of the noble

follows the passage about moral competition, and should be interpreted in terms of it. When I assign myself the noble, this is not like assigning myself money. Because virtue is the kind of 'Shelleyan' good where to divide is not to take away, I am not worsening anyone else's position. Indeed, I am improving it, since all benefit by my doing virtuous actions, which is what I do when I assign myself the noble. True self-love has by this point been divorced of all the usual suggestions of selfishness and the ordinary kind of competition. However, I think that this merely postpones the problem. The more we stress the point that Aristotle has redefined the content of self-loving behavior, the more striking it remains that self-sacrifice is explained as being, formally, self-love. After all, Aristotle was faced with *endoxa* about self-sacrifice and a thesis about self-love: it is noteworthy that the way he reconciles them is by making self-love basic, even in a special and redefined sense.

Perhaps we could argue that Aristotle is not really trying to explain self-sacrifice away, or to reduce it to self-love. Rather, he represents the agent as caring for others for their own sake, and as sacrificing his interests to theirs; but, he adds, this is *also* a case of the agent getting what matters, the noble, and the nobler, the greater the self-sacrifice.¹⁷ Aristotle is claiming that self-love of the right kind is *consistent* with our *endoxa* about self-sacrifice; he does not have to claim that it shows that these beliefs are really wrong, or not what they seem. Thus Terence Irwin writes,

Clearly the virtuous person's attitude to his friend's good is not entirely selfless and self-forgetful. But Aristotle takes it to be consistent with concern for the friend's good for his own sake. It is because this sort of concern is fine that the virtuous person thinks it is part of his good. Hence the virtuous friend never 'sacrifices himself,' if that implies sacrifice of his own interests to another's; but he is no less concerned for the friend's good for the friend's own sake than a 'self-sacrificing' person would be.¹⁸

On this view, the agent sacrifices his money, say (taking the example at 1169 a 26-9), so that his friends can get more money. He does this for the friends' sake, because this is a noble thing to do, and not for any ulterior reason (such as showing off). But he also 'assigns the greater good to himself,' for in doing a virtuous action he is doing what matters more to him than gaining money; so he is achieving for himself what he regards as his good.

This seems perfectly consistent as long as we describe it from outside, in the third person. But when we ask what form the agent's thought takes, it appears more problematic. Is the

agent supposed to think, 'I'll sacrifice this money so that my friends can gain more, for that is a generous action, and so noble; *and* I'm sacrificing mere money and gaining the noble, so I'm assigning myself the greater good, and so come off best after all'? There is clearly something wrong with this thought; the second half undermines the first. The agent cannot give as his end in doing something *both* that he is helping his friends for their sake *and* that he is assigning himself the greater good of acting virtuously. We can, however, from the outside, understand the agent to be doing both these things. The solution is surely that the agent's aim is just acting for the sake of others; in doing this he is in fact getting some good for himself, but this is not part of his aim. It is what he is doing in his whole life, which is directed at the performance of virtuous actions, and we could say that it explains his actions, but it is not his aim. Self-love of the right kind explains and justifies what the agent does, but it is not what motivates him.

A distinction like this explains a lot about the curious procedure of IX 8.¹⁹ As we have seen, Aristotle seems oddly determined to defend the thesis that the good person should be a lover of self, even at the cost of defending counter-intuitive theses and paradoxical reinterpretations of familiar beliefs. A lot of the difficulty vanishes if we take it that the thesis he defends is not a thesis about what our aims should be, but rather a thesis about the way our life should turn out to be, though not as a matter of our conscious aim. The agent who dies for others is in fact assigning himself the greater good, but he does not have this thought; his thought is simply that he should sacrifice himself for others. It is in fact a kind of self-love that he is expressing, for he is a virtuous person who identifies himself with his rational and virtuous practical reasoning. That is, in doing the virtuous act he feels that it is his act, and is not seriously drawn away from it by other considerations. Thus the self-sacrificing act can be rightly said to be an expression of his love for the life of actively virtuous practical reasoning, and thus for himself, for this is what he most deeply feels to be himself. We can see why Aristotle would want to reconcile a thesis like this with basic beliefs that good people act for the sake of others. What is hard to see is why Aristotle would want to reconcile these with the idea that a good person, in being good, consciously aims in some way at his own good.

In this light the presentation of self-love as heroic seems less objectionable also. For the virtuous person is not thought of as consciously rejecting the humdrum, as though it were

beneath her; rather, she chooses what is in fact a more heroic option, and so more creditable to herself. What she chooses is the greater good, and is more heroic, but what motivates her is the thought that virtue requires this sacrifice, not the thought that she will be a hero.

Aristotle does not, of course, tell us that this is how we should read IX 8; but equally he does not tell us to read it as wholly concerned with the agent's conscious motivation either. It may well be, of course, that he had not thought the problem wholly through.²⁰ But there are obvious advantages in ascribing to him the view that self-love is not what motivates, even in part, the self-sacrificer.

One lies in the fact that the conclusion of IX, while formally contained within the passage, does seem to have important implications for the whole of the *Ethics*. There is no sign that Aristotle thought of extending the results of IX 8 to the *Ethics* as a whole;²¹ nonetheless it is a real question, why we should not so extend them. The conclusion, that acting for another's sake, even extreme self-sacrifice, is really a kind of self-love, is one that cannot be restricted to the discussion of friendship. The virtuous person will often have to act for the sake of others, and put her interest behind those of others; if this is really a case of self-love, then self-love will be in an important way more basic than virtue, since developing the virtues will be an expression of self-love.

It has often been thought that the place of self-love in IX 8 shows that Aristotle's ethics is really self-centred in some fundamental way. But this has generally rested on the understanding that in IX 8 Aristotle claims that self-love will be what motivates, or partially motivates, the altruistic or self-sacrificing agent. If IX 8 is better interpreted, as I have suggested, as saying that self-love underlies and explains, but does not motivate, the altruistic agent, then the role of self-love in the *Ethics* as a whole becomes quite distinct from the question of how self-centred the agent is. IX 8 would rather suggest that, in any case of virtuous or altruistic action, what the agent does is explained in two ways. At the level of what motivates the agent, we have to give the story of the development of virtuous dispositions and practical reasoning, which is what the bulk of the *Ethics* does. But at a level deeper than what motivates the agent, we can also talk of what the agent does as an expression of self-love. Wicked or faulty agents show their self-love in greedy or unjust actions; the virtuous agent will show his self-love in acting virtuously, since the self he loves is his developed capacity for practical reasoning, and it is the activity of this which finds expression

in practical reasoning. Thus self-love takes radically different forms in the person who sees himself as fundamentally a moral person, and the person who sees himself rather in terms of ambition or desires.

It might be said that even if self-love figures as I have suggested, namely as underlying and explaining an agent's actions, rather than by way of the agent's aims, this still leaves Aristotle's theory self-centred, though at a different level. Even if the agent is not consciously aiming at his own good, still what he does is most deeply seen as an expression of his commitment to a certain conception of himself, what he is. Now it is certainly true that this contrasts formally with conceptions of ethics that see it as most fundamentally a commitment to doing one's duty, or to increasing good consequences. But it is far from self-centredness in the ordinary sense, which stands in contrast to such conceptions. Whether it remains self-centred in a problematic way cannot be determined in advance of a thorough investigation.

If the function of self-love in IX 8, and implicitly in the rest of the *Ethics*, is something like what I have suggested, then it is arguable that self-love can be a fundamental and explanatory concept when we try to understand the *Ethics* as a whole. There has been little recent attempt to do this in work on Aristotle, partly because self-love turns up in a limited context in IX 8, and Aristotle himself does not encourage us to interpret the *Ethics* as a whole in these terms. But the conclusions of IX 8 are general in their scope, even if Aristotle himself does not develop this point. We may seem to be drawing a sweeping conclusion in extending to other parts of the *Ethics* the conclusions of IX 8; but we are surely entitled to ask whether self-love so understood can help us to understand some of the main parts of the *Ethics*. One interesting recent attempt to do this is a suggestive and stimulating paper by Marcia Homiak²² in which she raises the possibility that self-love in Aristotle's sense can make more understandable to us the form that the virtues take and the doctrine of the mean. The true lover of self loves his ability to reason practically, rather than any particular end that rational planning might achieve, and this, Homiak argues, places considerable constraints on how various dispositions will develop which involve rational planning—will, in fact, ensure that what is produced is the virtues.

In the ancient world Aristotle's own school seems, at least at one point, to have been inclined to see self-love as basic to the structure of the *Ethics*. We possess a summary of Aristotelian ethics generally attributed in its final form to

Arius Didymus, Augustus' court philosopher.²³ What has surprised many scholars is that it begins with a long passage which describes the concern we instinctively have for ourselves and for others, and the ways in which this rationally develops. It describes how self-concern develops, as a human develops, into a concern for one's reason, and hence for virtue. It gives us what Aristotle does not, a *developmental* account of how primitive and instinctive self-love develops beyond a concern for external goods and bodily excellences to a concern for one's ability to reason, and hence a concern for oneself as a rational being who can comprehend and follow the demands of virtue. And this is followed by a summary of what is recognizably the content of the *Ethics* that we read.

The account is heavily influenced by Stoic accounts of *oikeiôsis*, and for this reason scholars have been quick to dismiss it as muddle, or mindless eclecticism. But it is more reasonable to see the passage as a deliberate attempt to carry out, with Stoic terms, an interpretation of the *Ethics* starting from self-love.²⁴ A sympathetic reading of the Arius passage will, I think, make it clear that the author read IX 8 in much the same way as I have suggested, and that he made it, and some other passages in VIII and IX, the basis for his interpretation of the ideas in the *Ethics* as a whole. I am not suggesting that we follow his lead; merely that we recognize that it is interesting, and perfectly legitimate to see self-love as basic for the *Ethics*, rather than peripheral. If we do, we may gain in our understanding of Aristotle. We will certainly become clearer about an interesting and neglected topic, the way Aristotelian ethics developed in relation to the theories that followed it.

NOTES

¹ I shall concentrate on the Nicomachean version of the ethics, although sometimes referring to the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) and to the *Magna Moralia* (*MM*). (I follow the widespread practice of treating the Nicomachean version as the definitive one, the Eudemian one as earlier and the *Magna Moralia* as relevant to the other versions but of disputed authenticity.) *EE* VII 6 and 12 and *MM* II 11.47-50 and 15 contain material analogous to *NE* IX 4; *MM* II 13-14 corresponds to *NE* IX 8, adding nothing new.

² I take it that Aristotle is not an egoist in the most commonly used modern sense, namely that he thinks that the agent should attach no weight at all to the interests of others, except as these may instrumentally serve the agent's own good. This is called 'pure' egoism by Richard Kraut, in an excellent and lucid discussion of the issue in ch. 2 of his forthcoming book on happiness in Aristotle. (I am very grateful to Kraut for letting me read and quote from this material.) Kraut also argues that Aristotle is not a modified egoist: neither a 'combative' egoist, who accepts that the interests of others can weigh independently with the agent, but that in conflicts of interests the agent

should always put her own first, nor a 'benign' egoist, who denies that there are real conflicts of interests. There is a looser and popular sense of 'egoist' in which it is very often claimed that Aristotle is an egoist: namely, that Aristotle's agent does not accord the interests of others adequate weight for the theory to be one that we would consider moral. This is an issue which I will discuss, though to avoid confusion I shall refer to this as 'self-centredness.' I use 'altruism' for what Aristotle describes at 1168 a 33-35: acting for the sake of another, sacrificing your own interests. Commonsensically, this occurs; the question is, how we explain it. In this sense altruism does not imply that you systematically discount your own interests.

³ Cf. J. Annas, 'Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism,' *Mind* 86, 1977, 532-54.

⁴ Cf. Aristotle's endoxic account of friendship in *Rhetoric* II 4, especially the beginning, where *philein* is defined as wishing for someone what one thinks to be goods, for his sake and not one's own, and producing them as far as one can. This crucial point about friendship is stressed by John Cooper in 'Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,' *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (1977), 619-648, and 'Friendship and the Good in Aristotle,' *The Philosophical Review* 86 (1977), 290-315.

⁵ Aristotle says 'father's,' *patrikê*; T. Irwin in his note on the passage (translation and notes on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hackett 1985), treats it as a *father's* friendship, and rightly complains in the note on 1161 b 26 that Aristotle has moved to talking of mothers. But immediately after talking of a father's friendship Aristotle moves to the plural and talks of 'the parents,' *hoi goneis*; this and the move to talking of mothers suggests that Aristotle has parental friendship in mind throughout, though, as would be natural in his society, he uses 'father's' to cover it.

⁶ Cf. Chrysippus' oft-repeated statement that at birth, *euthus genomenoi*, we have affinity to (*oikeiounmetha pros*) ourselves, our parts and our offspring. (cf. e.g., Plutarch, *de Stoic. repugn.* 1038 B.) Of course we do not have offspring at birth; what is meant is that we are born with an instinct to love and feel concern for ourselves and our offspring. The latter instinct will not come into play until we later have offspring, but when it does it is still an inborn instinct, not something we have to learn.

⁷ Because of the emphasis on family and kin friendships, the word *oikeion* appears not only in the sense of proper or appropriate, but also in the sense of being akin or related to. In some passages, e.g., 1161 b 18 ff, *oikeion* and *sunoiikeiousthai* are used in the sense of feeling akin to or feeling affinity with; at 1162 a 1 ff this is contrasted with the sense of literally being akin. These passages must have been one support for the later Peripatetic recasting of Aristotle's ethics in a way which makes self-love primary, understood in terms of the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiôsis*; see n. 24.

⁸ Arius 125.21-2. Cf. also the way that *philautia* turns up as a *vice* (143.14-16): it is the extreme (shown in loving yourself too much) of which the defect is loving others too little and the mean is *philia*.

⁹ Kraut (above, p. 2), section 9 and section 12, from which the quotation comes.

¹⁰ A caveat: of course we must sometimes use one passage of Aristotle to explain another. I prefer not to do so in this case partly because of the many strange and rather special features of this chapter, partly because I think that we can explain the chapter adequately without relying on outside assumptions.

¹¹ I do not see that Kraut's account really does justice to the point that *everyone* gets the greatest good; on his account one person gets most, while the others get more than they would have had they not competed, but still

less than the winner. Kraut emphasises that competition produces many benefits (increased effort, etc.) which one can care about more than caring about whether one wins. I have been concentrating on a narrower (but, I think, more usual) notion of competition in which the point of competing is to win; the competitive urge is to do better than the others; competitive people care most about coming first, etc. On this view the benefits of competition are quite distinct from competition itself, and caring primarily about them is precisely not to care about competition.

¹² *Epipsychidion* 160-161. This is not, of course, true of love, as Shelley found out the hard way. The images Shelley uses, and what he takes to be analogous phenomena, are interesting. The passage continues:

Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human phantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams
Mind from its object differs most in this:
Evil from good; misery from happiness;
The baser from the nobler; the impure
And frail, from what is clear and must endure.
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away;
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared

And compare this, from a fragment not used in the final version:

Free love has this, different from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away:—
Like ocean, which the general north wind breaks
Into ten thousand waves, and each one makes
A mirror of the moon: like some great glass,
Which did distort whatever form might pass,
Dashed into fragments by a playful child,
Which then reflects its eyes and forehead mild;
Giving for one, which it could ne'er express,
A thousand images of loveliness.

¹³ *Isôs* is usually translated 'perhaps,' but here, as in some other places in Aristotle, it seems to have its later sense of 'certainty.'

¹⁴ Cf. the Homeric heroic ideal, expressed for example by Glaucus at *Iliad* 6, 206 ff, esp. 208: *aien aristuein kai hupeirochon emmenai allôn*.

¹⁵ Kraut, op. cit., section 10.

¹⁶ In section 11 Kraut ingeniously argues that the person who assigns more of the noble to himself by causing a friend, rather than himself, to act virtuously, is acting admirably, rather than obnoxiously, because he is not taking an unfair share of a fixed number of opportunities for virtuous behavior. Rather, his own virtuous action creates more opportunities, so that he is not removing from his friends any opportunities that they would otherwise have had. This seems to depend on the 'Shelleyan' feature of virtue noted above, rather than on a point about altruism versus self-centredness.

¹⁷ John Cooper has suggested to me that the problem disappears if we lay due stress on the idea of getting the noble: properly understood, this is not the kind of thing that is rightly represented as the agent getting some good desirable to herself. I agree that Aristotle could have stressed what we would call the moral implications of getting the noble in such a way that there would not be a *contrast* between acting for this and self-sacrifice. But in this chapter Aristotle himself seems to regard it as a *prima facie* problem that the person acting for reasons of virtue is getting something for himself; although he does not think that altruism turns out really to be self-centredness, he seems to worry about it, and is prepared to accept an uncharacteristic amount of counter-intuitive claims to avoid it.

¹⁸ Note on 1169 a 35- b 1, translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hackett 1985.

¹⁹ I am not, of course, claiming that it explains everything about the oddities of the chapter's procedure to which I have drawn attention.

²⁰ Epicurus seems not to have successfully met an analogous problem, and Mill in similar straits was indecisive. See J. Annas, 'Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness,' *Philosophical Topics* vol. XV #2, Fall 1987, 5-21.

²¹ And since the *NE* as we have it is put together by Andronicus from Aristotle's works, it is risky to assume that Aristotle must have faced the question, how to relate IX 8 to the rest of the *NE*.

²² 'Virtue and Self-Love in Aristotle's Ethics,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XI, number 4, 1981, pp. 633-651. Homiak says, rightly, that 'self-love is best seen as the cause of virtuous behavior and not the end for which virtuous actions are done. Because self-love is a higher-order attitude towards planning, it is not a part of one's life-plan and hence not something one strives for *qua* part of one's plan. In this sense, Aristotle's self-love does not constitute someone's purpose or reason for acting; it is not a goal a person strives to achieve. But . . . someone with the appropriate feelings of self-love will act virtuously, as a natural causal consequence of his psychological state' (p. 640). She does not, however, discuss the IX 8 arguments.

²³ It is found in Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II, 116.19-152.25. The ascription to Arius is certain for this passage, circumstantial though plausible for the two neighboring ones. See Charles Kahn, 'Arius as a Doxographer,' 3-13 in W. Fortenbaugh (ed), *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics: the work of Arius Didymus*, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities Vol. I, New Brunswick 1983. Several of the other papers in the collection also touch on this issue. It has been much discussed whether Arius is himself responsible for this way of presenting Aristotelian ethics, or is, as seems more plausible, retailing a Peripatetic source.

²⁴ I discuss this passage, and its recasting of Aristotle's ethics, further in 'The Hellenistic version of Aristotle's Ethics,' for a collection on Hellenistic ethics edited by John Cooper for the *Monist* (forthcoming).